

VZCZCXRO4923
OO RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNH RUEHTRO
DE RUEHGO #0427/01 1491137
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 281137Z MAY 08
FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7687
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1240
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4784
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8328
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, AND IO
PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#) [EAID](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: ENCOURAGING SIGNS ON ACCESS TO THE DELTA

REF: RANGOON 417

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Ministry of Social Welfare is granting UN international staff permission to travel to the Delta with two days notice. Six staff applied for permission to travel on May 26 and all requests were granted. NGO international staff are also being granted permission to travel, though not as quickly. The Foreign Ministry will prioritize visas for UN staff and approve all applications. The ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force will hold their first meeting via teleconference on May 29, and the UN expects the Tripartite Core Group will hold its first meeting shortly afterwards in Rangoon. The ASEAN assessment team will return to Rangoon on May 30 to prepare a needs assessment by mid-June. The GOB notified the UN that large tents were urgently needed to set up classrooms for school children in the affected areas. Responsibility for relief efforts in the affected areas has been transferred from government ministers to the regional military commanders. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) UN Resident Coordinator Bishow Parajuli and Acting Humanitarian Assistance Coordinator Dan Baker briefed the dip corps today on developments regarding coordination of Cyclone Nargis relief efforts.

Access to the Delta

¶3. (SBU) On May 26, the Minister of Social Welfare told Baker that his ministry would give permission to UN workers to visit the Delta with two days notice. Baker speculated that NGOs would have to work with their line ministries and bilateral missions with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to obtain permission to visit the affected areas. Baker reported that since Monday, six UN international staff members been granted permission to visit the Delta: three from UNICEF and three from WFP. The UN has consolidated travel requests from all of their agencies into one submission to ensure coordination and expeditious approval. Baker informed the diplomatic corps that the Social Welfare Ministry required three items to grant travel permission: certification that the traveler is attached to a UN agency, purpose of travel, and itinerary. They do not need to travel

with GOB officials.

¶4. (SBU) Baker said that six international staff from INGOs had already been granted permission to travel to the Delta, and several others were in the process of applying. INGO ACF was told their permission would not be granted until the beginning of June. Baker also reported that during a trip to Labutta yesterday, he had met a five-member team of Germans manning a water purification plant that was producing 11,000 liters of purified water per hour for cyclone victims there. Additionally, two MSF-Switzerland staff were in Bogale. The UN will keep a centralized database of international staff working in the Delta to track movements and access of international staff. Today, WFP submitted a request for an international staff member to work for 30 days in the Delta.

¶5. (SBU) Baker noted that UN agencies, such as WHO and NGOs requesting travel permission through line ministries, would not necessarily receive approvals in two days. The UN requested to the Minister of Social Welfare to urge line ministries to grant travel permission in two days as well. NGOs Merlin and Malteser had both attempted to send international staff out to the Delta without permission, but authorities turned them around at check points.

Visas

¶6. (SBU) Baker noted that the UN also consolidated all of its agencies' visa requests to simplify visa issuances for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After receiving instructions from Nay Pyi Taw, the Minister of Foreign Affairs informed Baker the MFA had a new "liberal policy" for

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granting visas to UN staff. The Ministry would "prioritize" UN visas, and any UN employee that applied for a visa would be granted one. Unfortunately, Baker added, these visas had only two-week validities, with an option to extend. Baker believed this was an attempt by the GOB to ensure humanitarian workers eventually left the Delta. The UN would urge the MFA to grant visas of longer validity. Baker noted that several visas had been issued to UN staff in the last few days.

ASEAN Mechanism

¶7. (SBU) Baker told diplomats the first meeting of the ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force would take place by teleconference on May 29. He hoped that soon afterwards the Tripartite Core Group (TCG) would meet in Rangoon. Although membership in the TCG had not been finalized, Baker indicated the Thai Ambassador would be the lead ASEAN representative, Deputy Foreign Minister Kyaw Thu would be the lead GOB representative, and Baker himself would be the UN representative. He added the UN may rotate its other two members according to the subjects discussed at the task force's meetings. Charge d'Affaires urged Baker to organize a meeting for bilateral donors with the TCG as soon as possible, so that donors would be able to plug into the relief efforts. The ASEAN Secretariat had already set up offices in the Chatrium Hotel in Rangoon. Separately, we have received a request to fund some office equipment which OFDA is processing. However, this fact should not be publicized.

Assessment

¶8. (SBU) Parajuli notified donors the ASEAN Emergency Rapid Assessment Team (ERAT) would return to Burma on May 30 to prepare a needs assessment by mid-June. The UN would try to

loop the GOB in on the ERAT's assessment in order to incorporate GOB data. The UN was coordinating with UN Headquarters, the World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank, to add expertise to the assessment of relief and early recovery needs. Parajuli emphasized the UN wanted to move quickly in order to speed up disaster response efforts.

Tents Urgently Needed

¶9. (SBU) Baker remarked that he had returned from a "very productive" tour of the Delta with the Minister of Social Welfare. Baker had been reluctant to go on another GOB-sponsored tour, but took the opportunity to explain to the Minister the differences between a "tour" and a regular monitoring mechanism that international donors would require.

He said the Minister acknowledged the need for proper monitoring. The Minister requested large tents that could be used in place of classrooms because schools had been severely damaged. The GOB had postponed the resumption of the school year until July 2 in the affected areas but required 8,000 large tents (the equivalent of the U.S. military's GP Large Tents) so that makeshift classrooms could be set up before this date. The NGO Swiss Cooperation had supplied some, but several thousand more were needed.

Regional Commanders Now Directing Relief

¶10. (SBU) The UN also confirmed that the Ministers who had been assigned areas of responsibility in the Delta had been recalled to Nay Pyi Taw, so Regional Commanders were now directing relief efforts in their respective areas. The UN remarked that NGOs and UN staff reported this change had made access easier for their employees.

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¶11. (SBU) Comment: Way too slowly, more experts are on the way to the Delta. The UNICEF rep predicted it would be another week or two before we would know how much access expanded. Today's New Light of Myanmar carried the headline, "Donors may go right down to storm-hit areas of their choice." We intend to test this commitment by dispatching one of our poloffs to the Delta tomorrow. End comment.
VILLAROSA